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MS-13 LEADER AND ANOTHER GANG MEMBER CONVICTED

Third Trial Results in Third Trial Conviction

Greenbelt, Maryland - A federal jury convicted Israel Ramos Cruz, a/k/a "Taylor," a/k/a "Sastre," age 30, of Wheaton, Maryland, and Santos Maximo Garcia, a/k/a "Curley," age 30, today of conspiracy to participate in a racketeering enterprise, announced United States Attorney for the District of Maryland Rod J. Rosenstein. Cruz was also convicted of conspiracy to commit murder in aid of racketeering, murder in aid of racketeering, witness tampering murder, using a firearm in relation to a crime of violence, murder resulting from use of a gun, assault with a dangerous weapon in aid of racketeering, being an alien in possession of a gun and ammunition, and use of a gun during a crime of violence.

United States Attorney Rod J. Rosenstein said, "Joining MS-13 is a ticket to federal prison. Forty-seven alleged MS-13 gang members have been charged with federal crimes in Maryland. The young men who were convicted today probably will spend the rest of their lives in federal prison, and some of the remaining defendants may face death sentences."

Mr. Rosenstein added, "Most Maryland jurisdictions have adopted anti-gang strategies that combine law enforcement, education and community awareness in a coordinated program to deter gang violence."

According to testimony presented at the six week trial, the defendants conspired from at least 2001 to March 2007 to operate an MS-13 enterprise in Prince George's and Montgomery Counties through a pattern of racketeering activity which included eight murders in Maryland and one in Virginia; the use of deadly weapons including firearms, baseball bats, machetes, bottles or knives in the commission of numerous murders, attempted murders and assaults; assaults on an MS-13 gang member from El Salvador, juvenile females and rival gang members; kidnaping; obstruction of justice; and witness tampering.

Trial testimony showed that Cruz was the leader of the Sailors Locos Salvatruchos Westside (SLSW) clique in Prince George's County. Garcia collected and distributed dues from MS-13 members as a de facto treasurer for the SLSW clique.

On June 3, 2002 in Silver Spring, Maryland, Garcia and a fellow MS-13 member assaulted Garcia's ex-girlfriend and her friend. Garcia hit their vehicle repeatedly with a baseball bat, and when the couple tried to drive off, the other gang member used a .380 semi-automatic handgun to fire at the vehicle several times. Neither victim was hit by the gunfire. Investigating police officers recovered two baseball bats in Garcia's car, as well as three .380 shell casings and the firearm in the immediate vicinity.

Cruz and other members of SLSW stabbed Osmin Alfaro Fuentes, aka "Buso," an MS-13 member from El Salvador on January 1, 2003.

Gang members, including Randy Calderon, murdered a suspected rival gang member Eliuth Madrigal in Silver Spring, Maryland on November 22, 2003. Shortly thereafter, Cruz and others attempted to cover up the murder by painting the walls of the residence in which Madrigal had been repeatedly stabbed.

On November 22, 2003, Cruz told gang member Randy Calderon, a/k/a "Fenix" that they wanted to "tag" (put graffiti on) a wall to "celebrate" the murder of Madrigal. In fact, Cruz had decided to kill Calderon because Calderon had participated in the murder of Madrigal, which had not been sanctioned by MS-13, and they feared that Calderon would implicate himself and other gang members to law enforcement. Another gang member fatally shot Calderon.

On July 22, 2004, Cruz and Garcia falsely testified before a state grand jury in Prince George's County, Maryland that was investigating MS-13 and the May 2004 gang murder of Ashley Antonio Urias. During their sworn testimonies, Cruz and Garcia falsely and repeatedly indicated that they were not current MS-13 members and that they did not know many MS-13 members.

From June 2002 to August 2005, Cruz and Garcia attended numerous meetings of MS-13, including a meeting in which gang members watched a videotape of gang investigators from the Prince George's County Police Department and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. Gang members identified investigating officers and agents, discussed ways to thwart law enforcement efforts and commented on the possibility of retaliation against police during several meetings. At another meeting where dues were collected, Garcia discussed not sending money to a gang member imprisoned for murder, because of suspicions that the imprisoned gang member had "spilled the beans" to the police.

Cruz faces a mandatory sentence of life in prison and Garcia faces a maximum sentence of life in prison for conspiracy to participate in a racketeering enterprise. U.S. District Judge Deborah K. Chasanow scheduled sentencing for Cruz on June 9, 2008, and for Garcia on August 15, 2008.

To date, this office has charged 49 gang members with various federal offenses, with 30 defendants charged in this RICO conspiracy case. Eighteen MS-13 members have been convicted in this RICO conspiracy case. Two MS-13 gang members were convicted at trial in November 2006 of conspiracy to commit murder in aid of racketeering, conspiracy to participate

in a racketeering enterprise and conspiracy to commit assaults with a deadly weapon: Oscar Ramos Velasquez, age 23, of Baltimore, was sentenced to 37 years in prison and Edgar Alberto Ayala, age 30, of Suitland, Maryland was sentenced to 35 years in prison. Three MS-13 leaders were convicted at trial in April 2007 on all counts of the racketeering conspiracy involving murder, robbery, obstruction of justice and witness tampering: Henry Zelaya, age 23, of Woodbridge, Virginia, and Omar Vasquez, age 29, of Alexandria, Virginia were sentenced to life in prison and Jose Hipolito Cruz, age 28, of Lanham, Maryland was sentenced to 35 years in prison.

United States Attorney Rod J. Rosenstein expressed his appreciation for the investigative work performed by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; the Prince George's County Police Department; the Federal Bureau of Investigation; U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement; the Montgomery County Department of Police; the Howard County Police Department; the Maryland National Capital Park Police; the Maryland State Police. The U.S. Attorney also recognized Prince George's County State's Attorney Glenn F. Ivey, Montgomery County State's Attorney John McCarthy, and Fairfax County, Virginia, Commonwealth's Attorney Robert F. Horan, Jr., for the assistance that they and their offices provided.

Mr. Rosenstein thanked Assistant U.S. Attorneys James Trusty and Chan Park, who are prosecuting the case.